

Regis University ePublications at Regis University

All Regis University Theses

Spring 2006

Cross-Functional Partnering and Empowerment in Storagetek Business Unit: Action Research Project

David Opp
Regis University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/theses>



Part of the [Business Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Opp, David, "Cross-Functional Partnering and Empowerment in Storagetek Business Unit: Action Research Project" (2006). *All Regis University Theses*. 151.
<https://epublications.regis.edu/theses/151>

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by ePublications at Regis University. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Regis University Theses by an authorized administrator of ePublications at Regis University. For more information, please contact epublications@regis.edu.

Regis University
School for Professional Studies Graduate Programs
Final Project/Thesis

Disclaimer

Use of the materials available in the Regis University Thesis Collection ("Collection") is limited and restricted to those users who agree to comply with the following terms of use. Regis University reserves the right to deny access to the Collection to any person who violates these terms of use or who seeks to or does alter, avoid or supersede the functional conditions, restrictions and limitations of the Collection.

The site may be used only for lawful purposes. The user is solely responsible for knowing and adhering to any and all applicable laws, rules, and regulations relating or pertaining to use of the Collection.

All content in this Collection is owned by and subject to the exclusive control of Regis University and the authors of the materials. It is available only for research purposes and may not be used in violation of copyright laws or for unlawful purposes. The materials may not be downloaded in whole or in part without permission of the copyright holder or as otherwise authorized in the "fair use" standards of the U.S. copyright laws and regulations.

Running head: CROSS-FUNCTIONAL PARTNERING

Cross-Functional Partnering and Empowerment in StorageTek Business Unit:

Action Research Project

David Opp

Regis University

Abstract

Employees in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing at StorageTek believed empowerment and cross-functional partnering was not meeting their expectations. Based on this information, an action research project was executed to look at the reasons for this feedback, and recommend corrective action to this issue. The process started with the facilitator of the project creating a collaborative team. The team used secondary data, and collected data through individual interviews, group interviews, and focus group meetings. The data analysis resulted in the recommendation that changes to training, goal defining, job titles, task clarification, and to the rewards and recognition be implemented to improve empowerment and cross-functional partnering in the departments.

Cross-Functional Partnering and Empowerment in StorageTek Business Unit

At StorageTek employee satisfaction is measured by results from an annual employee survey. The 2004 survey results revealed that in the Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing departments the employees were not satisfied with empowerment and cross-functional partnering issues. This information was used as a starting point for an action research project to understand the issues more clearly, diagnose the problem, and provide three recommendations for improving employee satisfaction.

Background of Organization

StorageTek was founded in 1969, employs about 7,000 people worldwide, and is a publicly traded company listed on the New York Stock Exchange. The company, headquartered in Louisville, Colorado, is in the computer peripherals business and in 2004 had revenue of \$2.2 billion dollars. StorageTek is in the technology sector and manufactures tape back up and recovery products. The StorageTek business model includes the design, manufacture, sale and maintenance of data storage hardware and software along with providing support services. StorageTek integrates third-party partner solutions in their systems. More than 40,000 customers use these solutions to store and retrieve information electronically from data centers in corporate computing environments. StorageTek has a diverse customer base that includes government institutions, Fortune 500 corporations and large private corporations worldwide. The vision of the company is to be recognized as the storage expert providing storage solutions that manage and protect business-critical information (About StorageTek, 2004). Historically StorageTek has endured periods of financially mixed performance with continual up-cycles and down-cycles. There have been periods of time where the company was extremely successful, and other times where the company was in bankruptcy. According to the About StorageTek Fact Sheet, it currently has experienced 14 straight quarters of earnings growth.

Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing are departments that align under the General Services business group at StorageTek. The Software Manufacturing department first aligned with the same manager under the General Services organization family

about 3 years ago. Prior to that, Software Manufacturing reported to another management group that has essentially been dissolved. The Software Manufacturing management is no longer with the company but the majority of the employees are the same. Corporate Printing and Literature Distribution have been in the General Services organization for over 15 years. Until 5 years ago they had different reporting managers. The Literature Distribution organization has experienced a significant reduction in its work force, while Corporate Printing has just recently experienced a reduction. The staff across the board has an average tenure of 12 years with the longest tenured employee being 25 years and the newest 2 years.

Corporate Printing has responsibility for the printing and sourcing of all company collateral. This group averages 1,250 job requests a month and is comprised of 10 employees working over two shifts. Over the last 7 years the headcount has reduced from 13 employees to 10 employees requiring process efficiency improvements that meet the demands of the workload. About 66% of Corporate Printing job requests are distributed by its peer organizations, Literature Distribution and Software Manufacturing.

Literature Distribution has responsibility for distributing all of the marketing collateral to the worldwide employee base of the company. This function is deadline driven, and Literature Distribution provides the final step in the demand generation fulfillment process. Literature Distribution has daily interaction with StorageTek employees and processes about 400 orders per month. The group is comprised of two individuals, and over the last 5 years the headcount has been reduced from five employees to its current level.

Software Manufacturing has responsibility for processing and distributing software orders that integrate with the computer peripherals that StorageTek sells. These software orders tie to revenue, and as a result the group has performance metrics linking directly to how quickly an order is processed. Software Manufacturing relies on Corporate Printing to deliver its build-to-order documentation. There are six employees in Software Manufacturing, and when the group transitioned to the General Services Organization 3 years ago, two open headcount were eliminated.

I have had management responsibility for Corporate Printing for 7 years, Literature Distribution for 5 years, and Software Manufacturing for 3 years. As the corporation has downsized, the responsibility for headcount has been assigned to me. The current role of manager of Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing is my first career management position.

The Competitive Environment

StorageTek hired a new Chief Executive Officer in 2000, and with his appointment a culture shift started. The executive management team immediately introduced the concept of performance management, and this has created a competitive environment at StorageTek. The performance management concept has resulted in three key changes.

First, goals at the individual, department, and organization levels all must be aligned to the corporate goals. Goal reporting is monthly and performance is based on predefined metrics that measure accomplishment. If a goal is not met, the individual, department, or organization must document a corrective plan to bring the goal into compliance. The performance management concept activity immediately resulted in competitive pressures.

Second, there have been continuous organizational changes in the corporation over the last 7 years. These changes have ranged from an across-the-board corporate reduction in force to small scale department reduction in force. Corporate Printing and Literature Distribution over the last 5 years have lost three employees to reduction in force activity. The reductions in force events and organizational changes have contributed at times to a mindset that creates competition among individual contributors, departments and organizations.

The third change that has created a competitive environment is the performance appraisal process. Prior to the current executive management team, the appraisal process required managers to meet with employees on their anniversary date with the company and deliver the annual performance review. Any merit changes required one-level-up management approval. This model was replaced by a system where all employees were reviewed over the same time period. Additionally, there is a midyear non-merit review that stresses performance and goal

attainment. Merit adjustments are defined at an executive management team level based on score ranges, and within organizations there is an expected distribution of performance.

These three changes have created a competitive environment in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution and Software Manufacturing and throughout the company. Individuals feel the pressure to perform, department managers push individual performance, mid-level management drives department performance and the executive management team pushes the organization performance.

The Problem

Based on the 2004 StorageTek Employee Survey (2004), and from individual employee-manager interactions, the staff in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing indicated that cross-functional partnering and empowerment was not meeting their satisfaction. In the StorageTek Employee Survey (2004) only 55% of employees in these departments felt highly empowered in their work. When asked about decision making, only 52% thought that the decisions were made at the right level of the organization. Cooperation across different parts of the organization scored only a 28% approval, and teamwork used as a method to get the work done was at 42%. Employees indicated that the delegation of authority and the ability to act on their own was not meeting their satisfaction with 82% feeling no empowerment.

History of the problem. Historically StorageTek has held to a command-and-control management style. Decisions typically have been made from the top and filtered down. This is illustrated by a period in the late 1980s when StorageTek was emerging from bankruptcy, and the CEO at the time was authoritarian; decisions were made in a vertical manner from manager to manager, and finally to the individual contributor. This rigid structure of decision making instilled a corporate culture that has extended to the current CEO. The current CEO has made it a priority to change this culture. It has been difficult for the layers of management to relinquish this control and for the individual contributors to assume more responsibility.

The history of the problem in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing is no different than what StorageTek as a company is facing. I was trained with a

management philosophy that was control based and moving from this mindset has been a challenge. As I work to promote employee empowerment and support cross-functional partnering, the organizational problems have appeared. What was predictable in the past now appears unpredictable to these departments.

Problem statement. Employee feedback in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution and Software Manufacturing indicated that cross-functional partnering and empowerment were not meeting the expectations of the employees. The purpose of this action research project was to determine in the organization why cross-functional partnering and empowerment were lacking and determine the necessary intervention to properly correct the issue.

Literature Review

Based on the problem statement for this action research project, I identified literature that provided additional information on the topic as well as theories that when applied to the problem provided the basis for research.

The team dynamic in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing needs to be investigated. Huszczo (1996) provided a thorough overview of how to prepare, implement, and maintain strong team dynamics. Of specific interest is where Huszczo identified seven key components in effective teams. There are aspects of the Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing team dynamic that appear to be lacking the Huszczo components. Those components are having a clear sense of direction, having talented members, having clear and enticing responsibilities, having efficient operating procedures, having constructive interpersonal relationships, having active reinforcement systems, and having constructive external relationships. Therefore, referencing specific information in the Huszczo book and analyzing it in relation to the departments was pertinent and useful.

Supervisory Management (1995) emphasized training on cross-functional teams (CFT) as critical to their success. The article also stresses the value and productivity that CFTs bring to organizations. The article discussed how companies implement teams. The position presented is that many companies are unsure of exactly how to implement teams. This point further expands

to suggest that many companies are even unsure of how to train staffers. These staff employees never receive formal training related to team interaction. Related to Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing, the staff has not been trained as how to work in a team setting, and the interaction of the staff at times is ineffective. The article quotes Parker (1995) on this point: "People aren't accustomed to working in teams, and they need some sort of training to help them make this important transition (p. 10)." For this project, I reviewed the training process for staff members and solicited feedback on the current department training model in order to determine if this model contributed to the employee dissatisfaction.

According to Senge (1994), it is important to build a learning organization, articulate to the employees of an organization the meaning of the learning organization concept and how to maintain this dynamic. Senge also wrote about creating a shared vision. Senge argued that the creation of a shared vision is vital to organization success and that every organization has a purpose for its existence. When team members understand this, performance and satisfaction improve. The result is team members being engaged in their work and thus linking organizations together. On the surface, it seems that Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing lack the cohesiveness that organizations with this shared vision possess. Therefore, I plan to analyze if the employees have a shared vision and how this vision contributes to or mitigates the problem statement of dissatisfaction over the lack of empowerment and cross-functional collaboration.

Whitworth and Riccomini (2005) suggested that the level of employee performance will have a direct bearing on the likely success of cross-functional partnering and empowerment. They find that creating a positive communication channel between managers and their direct reports not only makes sense, it makes great business sense. Their opinion is that if managers effectively communicate with their employees, then those employees would likely perform to higher standards. Based on the Whitworth and Riccomini position, I looked at Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing to determine if the same results

might apply to improving the perception with the employees regarding cross-functional collaboration.

Northouse (2004) distinguished between management and leadership, and that distinction merits review for Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing. Managers and Leaders are not the same; to what extent the departments have leaders in addition to a manager should be reviewed. In these groups are there leaders throughout that are empowered to make decisions related to the daily business operation? Or is there a control base centered on management making the majority of the daily business decisions? The history of StorageTek's management philosophy suggests it is a company with a command-and-control structure. However, the problem of empowerment and cross-functional partnering may be linked to Northouse's (2004) position that leadership influences a group of individuals to achieve a communal goal. For Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing a valid question is, if there are leaders in the departments, then what decision-making latitude do they have? Or, if there is not leadership representation, how do you infuse this into the departments?

Another contributing factor to the low satisfaction levels in the departments may be related to job security. The history at StorageTek is marked with almost continual company instability and thus job uncertainty. This has been a contributing factor to employee satisfaction overall. Park and Burrows (2003) highlighted steps taken at Dell Computer in response to employee survey results in the fall of 2001. The survey followed the company's first-ever mass layoffs, and it found that half of Dell Inc.'s employees would leave if they were offered the chance. This feedback is very similar to feedback from the StorageTek Denison (2004) survey. Dell was able to improve its employee satisfaction. According to Park and Burrows (2003) Dell changed the company management style to be direct, eliminate excuses, keep the focus on goals rather than resting on accomplishments, have shared management responsibility in its structure, and leave the ego at the door. StorageTek executive management is pushing accountability throughout the organization, but examining what Dell implemented and comparing that to what

StorageTek has accomplished may be useful. Are there differences between the StorageTek approach, or are they similar, and how does this impact the feedback?

Marshall (1995) stated that the way to build ownership of a team's operation, and to ensure the alignment of its members, is to leverage a strategic company direction. This strategic direction should include a collaborative team structure. Marshall outlined eight steps to build an effective collaborative team. These eight steps start with clarifying the team's task or function, clarifying team roles and responsibilities, establishing operating agreements, creating a team charter, identifying critical success factors, developing an action plan, beginning collaborative skills development, and establishing measures and measuring progress. I believe this information is relevant to this action research project because it is unclear how thoroughly these concepts have been rolled out to the staff in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing staff. There may be an opportunity to incorporate these steps in the day-to-day business operation.

Todd (2002) believed that the notion of employee satisfaction may be overrated and could possibly have little relevance to the success of an organization. Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing as departments in General Services are measured against performance metrics monthly. Over the last 3 years the metrics have continued to demonstrate that the goals have been achieved. This suggests strong overall performance in the departments. Therefore weighing the department's performance against the overall employee satisfaction for empowerment and cross-functional partnering might merit research. The results may agree with or contradict Todd's premise.

Paul, Niehoff, and Turnley (2000) wrote that there are many challenges to implementing empowered structures in an organization. The authors offer a complex set of requirements for effective empowerment on work teams. They pose questions regarding whether the right management controls are in place, the mix of employees is optimal, how much empowerment an employee should have, and when employees should be empowered. These fundamental questions need to be understood before placing responsibilities on employees. For Corporate

Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing these are valid questions that were carefully reviewed during the action research process.

A section in the Harvard Business Essentials (2003) addressed helping people adapt. Based on the history of StorageTek and the departments, this section should be reviewed and related to Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing. At this time I am not sure if all of the members have made their way through all of the stages that transpire when organizations change. Some of the team members are still holding a mental model that contributes to the low satisfaction levels. As a result, where the employees were in the change process did become apparent in the data gathering sections of the action research process.

The literature reviewed for this action research project is insightful when considering the range of possible contributing factors to the current problem. I believe that the cited authors have done solid research which was leveraged in this action research project.

Entering and Contracting

In order to effectively start this action research project, securing management sponsorship, and constructing a collaborative team was a critical step. First, the StorageTek management sponsor was presented with the project brief which outlined the basics of the action research project. These basics included the reason for the project; the problem statement, an estimated timeline, a list of the collaborative team members with their estimated time commitment, and a section on how the project is concluded. The Senior Business Manager in General Services agreed to the project scope, and the Professional Project Contract was signed. She was the sponsor for this project because the Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing departments report in her organization. The Senior Business Manager had a vested interest in the project because the low employee satisfaction ratings impacted her overall composite. Since they were low, her interest was in solutions that potentially would improve the composite and thus improve the organization's score.

The second group to enter and contract with was the collaborative team. The collaborative team was made up of a cross-section of four department employees from Corporate

Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing, and one General Services organization employee. The four department employees were of various job classifications and expressed interest in participating on department process improvement teams. The General Services employee, a Six Sigma Green Belt who had acted as a facilitator in the past with organization issues, was interested in improving organization dynamics at the company. These individuals were approached and explained the project and its basic purpose. A kickoff meeting was held where a project brief similar to the one presented to the project sponsor was reviewed. The only difference was more specific information regarding the participation expectations and the collaborative role clarification. Shortly after the kickoff meeting, individual meetings were scheduled to answer any questions and to sign participation agreements which cover confidentiality issues and participation requirements. At this point the overview was complete and the team was prepared to begin the process.

Method

Action Research

Definition. “The action research model focuses on planned change as a cyclical process in which initial research about the organization provides information to guide subsequent action. Then the results of the action are assessed to provide further information to guide further action, and so on. This iterative cycle of research and action involves considerable collaboration among organization members and OD practitioners” (Cummings & Worley, 2001, p. 23).

Action research. There are several reasons why action research is the best research model to use when examining employee dissatisfaction related to empowerment and cross-functional partnering. First, there is a performance problem in these groups as indicated by the members’ responses to the Denison (2004) survey. Action research is appropriate because the individual contributors and management can collaboratively shape a change related to these issues. The employee input and participation is going to provide benefits to the organization long term. The entire staff will contribute to the change recommendations and want to make sure implementation of it happens correctly. This is a powerful feature of action research versus a

different approach that force feeds change. If management were to dictate the change, the level of employee ownership would be different, possibly producing other results. The partnering element of having employee involvement is a definite advantage in any change process.

Second, the Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing departments knew they needed to change, but did not have the tools or wherewithal to know how to make that change. Action research is appropriate for scenarios just like this. In a logical, pragmatic manner, the research process allows the root cause of the employee dissatisfaction to surface, and a change can be developed to solve it. Lastly, the positive nature of action research as it relates to change will have a lasting effect on the departments. Rather than spending time discussing the negative and further damaging the morale of the group, action research focuses on the need for change in a positive manner. By using action research this positive focus can be created among the employees.

Third, an outstanding feature of action research is that the learned change process can be used in the departments in the future as other issues develop. The contributors learn a very powerful way to create lasting change. Through each step in the diagnosing, action planning, action taking, and evaluation process the benefits of action research give the department members tools that can be applied when solving other issues. The Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing departments should be able to make lasting change when future department issues are modeled through this process.

Action research model. The Cummings and Worley (2001) action research model was used for this project. I found this model particularly applicable to the project. First, I had existing data identifying a known problem. This immediately allowed the project to become focused. Second, my role as the action researcher was defined to my staff in an understandable manner. This model emphasizes establishing a collaborative atmosphere, and for these departments – based on their history – collaboration was critical. Third, the Cummings and Worley model allowed the use of different data-gathering methods. Because of the diverse employee base, I utilized as many tools as possible to formulate bias-free data.

In this paper only the first five steps will be reported. Step 1 is the problem identification stage. Employee dissatisfaction with empowerment and cross-functional partnering were identified in the StorageTek employee survey, and this information formed the project subject. Step 2 involves leading the project in the role of the action researcher. I assembled my collaborative team, provided them with an overview of the project, and discussed the planned activities with the departments so that all had an understanding of the purpose and the basic process. Step 3 is data gathering and preliminary diagnosis. For this project secondary data analysis, individual interviews, group interviews, and focus group meetings were the data-gathering methods. Analysis of data collected from data gathering instruments provided the information necessary to diagnose the problem. Before the diagnosis was made, feedback to the collaborative team and to the departments was provided. The feedback to the departments was preliminary and informational. For the collaborative team, the feedback will be provided so that step 5, a joint diagnosis, can be made.

Validity

It is critical that the data gathered is as accurate and complete as possible. This is necessary because the recommended solutions for the problem are based on the data analysis. If the data collected is inaccurate, the change recommendation will fail to produce the required results. The collaborative team strived to compile the most accurate and complete data possible.

To enhance the quality of the data-gathering process for this action research project several measures were used. Reviewing the secondary data related to low employee satisfaction concerning the issues of empowerment and cross-functional partnering was necessary for this project. The use of secondary data enhanced to the validity of the project because it was not subject to my bias.

By using several data-collection methods for this project the collaborative team was in a position to understand in broad terms the issues in the organization. This greater understanding helped in collaborative team's feedback and analysis.

Pilot testing the intended questions for each data-gathering method was a necessary step because it allows a researcher to determine if the questions produce the required data to analyze the problem (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). For this project, pilot testing of the individual and group interviews was done. Questions were tested for clarity and understanding, and the interviews indicated that there was very little confusion or misunderstanding of the questions.

Bias was reduced by using data analyst triangulation, which involved the collaborative team in the data analysis. The basic process that the collaborative team followed was to spend time reviewing and asking questions of the data that was collected. By having the collaborative team review the data, multiple perspectives were discussed and considered.

Data source triangulation was used to strengthen validity in this project. This type of triangulation can be used to analyze the data from different perspectives. The four data-gathering methods that will be used in this project all have strengths that will compensate for the weaknesses of the other methods.

Data-gathering Methods

Secondary data. The Denison (2004) StorageTek Employee Survey provided secondary data for both empowerment and cross-functional partnering. The survey defined four overlying categories: Mission, Consistency, Adaptability, and Involvement. As a subset of the Involvement category is Empowerment and Cross-functional Partnering. Within Empowerment and Cross-functional Partnering, several question responses were examined to determine department satisfaction. The satisfaction percentages for Empowerment and Cross-functional Partnering within the Involvement category were lower than anticipated. This information was used as the initial indicator that in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing there was a problem with empowerment and cross-functional partnering. This survey report is the first method that was used in the action research project. There were six questions and responses from the survey that provided valuable project information. The data indicated that the majority of the organization participated in the survey, and results provide an overall sampling of the employees' viewpoint about empowerment and cross-functional partnering. The Denison

survey provided valuable data and it was used immediately in the Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing organization diagnosis. The survey data reflected the responses of 13 of the 18 employees in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing. This represents 72% overall participation, and at the corporate level about 75% or 5,200 of the approximate 7,000 employees participated in the survey.

Individual interviews. Individual interviews were the next method used to collect data. Five individual interviews were completed for this action research project with participants from all of the groups. The interview process is important because there are several different job positions in the department, and individual conversation would likely provide the best communication session. Another reason for having interviews is to collect what Cummings and Worley (2001) referred to as rich data and to build rapport. Asking employees to potentially provide information to their manager on a subject that they may be dissatisfied with requires trust. Also there are a few employees in the group who would not express their opinions on the empowerment and cross-functional partnering problems in a group setting. My goal was to use these individual interviews to build rapport with these staff members so that they would feel more comfortable participating in the group data-gathering sessions. Additionally, the individual interview created a setting that generated detailed information. Within the three business groups, I interviewed six strategically-positioned employees. Because there are multiple job grades, ranging from hourly to salaried, I wanted to ensure that the interviews provided a sampling of each group.

Group interviews. Group interviews were chosen because much of the work in the departments requires assistance from peers. The goal of using group interviews was to leverage group synergy in the dialogue. There are 17 employees in the departments with a mix being salaried and the other hourly. I separated them into two representative groups and interview both. The group interview was facilitated and a schedule was provided to each participant. Coghlan and Brannick (2001) stated that interviewing in action research tends to be open-ended and unstructured. It focuses on feedback from the interviewee rather than confirming a pre-existing

hypothesis that the action researcher may have. By interviewing, the meetings were dynamic and highly participative. The staff was engaged in the topic, and the participation was good.

Focus groups. Based on the collected data, I reassembled the groups by department and shared some of the feedback with them. The format of the meeting was first to review with the staff the problems that related to empowerment and cross-functional partnering which were causing the most dissatisfaction. The second part was to review potential solutions that the collaborative team developed from the identified problem categories and then to solicit feedback if these solutions would address the concerns of the employees. The employees' initial feedback to the questions provided insight as to the reason for some of the responses. My plan was to present this information in report form and facilitate an open-ended brainstorming session. The goal was to have these individual departments discuss possible solutions to empowerment and cross-functional partnering as it relates specifically to them. This final data-gathering session provided one last opportunity to gather new data on the subject as well as collect additional feedback on what has already been articulated. After this data-gathering step has been completed, all of the data can be compiled, reviewed, and interpreted.

Participant attitudes. Overall, I was pleased with the attitudes of the participants in the action research project. In the individual interview setting the participants were vocal providing feedback that specifically detailed what they were thinking. The feedback was dictated by what the employee's perspective of the questions was. This perspective was free from peer influences because of the privacy of individual interviews. On its own the specific perspective of the answers could have affected the results of the project. However, because I also did group interviews, there was balance in the data collected.

The group interviews provided a broader perspective because the participants were in a setting where they listened and considered the feedback of their peers. The collaborative nature of group interviews created a collaborative source of information exchange. Initially in the group settings the feedback was more reserved because the participants were unsure of their peers' viewpoints. However, as the interviews progressed, I saw a much more open exchange of

thoughts. So overall, the employees were receptive to the process, and the two different interview formats balanced each other out so that the results were not biased in one specific area.

Results

Secondary Data

There were six questions that were specifically reviewed from the Denison (2004) survey. Three of the questions related to empowerment and three of the questions related to cross-functional partnering.

The first question related to empowerment was, “In this organization, authority is delegated so that people can act on their own.” The results for this question indicated that groups collectively scored in the 18th percentile for satisfaction. The second question was, “In this organization, decisions are usually made at the level where the best information is available.” The results for this question indicate that Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing scored in the 52nd percentile for satisfaction. The third question was, “In this organization most employees are highly involved in their work.” The results for this question indicated that Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing scored in the 55th percentile for satisfaction.

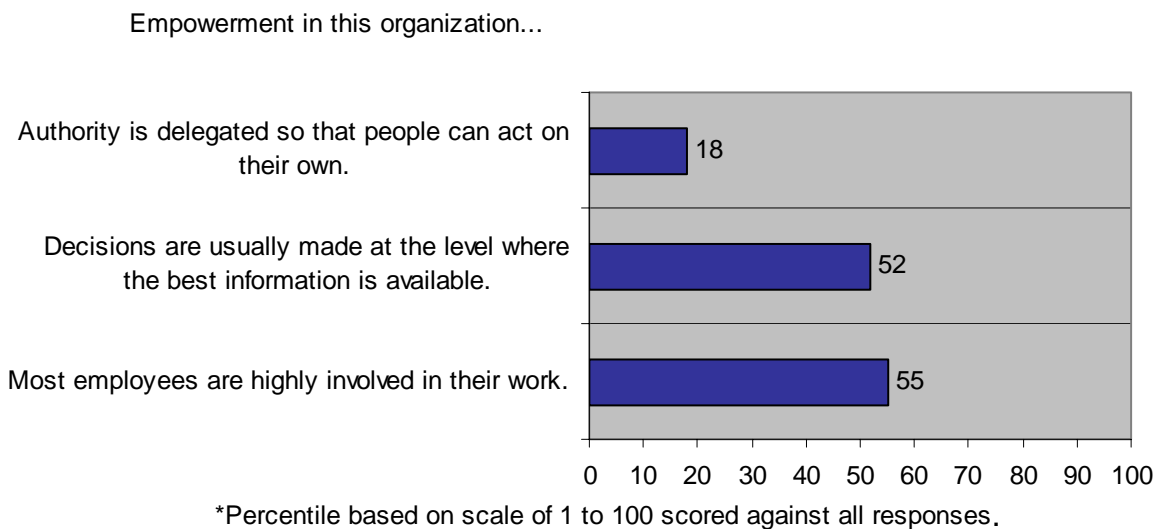


Figure 1. Summary of secondary data results.

The first question related to cross-functional partnering was, “In this organization cooperation across different parts of the organization is actively encouraged.” The results for this question indicated that groups scored in the 28th percentile for satisfaction. The second question was, “In this organization, teamwork is used to get work done, rather than hierarchy.” The results for this question indicated that groups scored in the 35th percentile for satisfaction. The third question was, “In this organization, people work like they are part of a team.” The results for this question indicate that Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing scored in the 42nd percentile for satisfaction.

Cross-functional partnering in this organization...

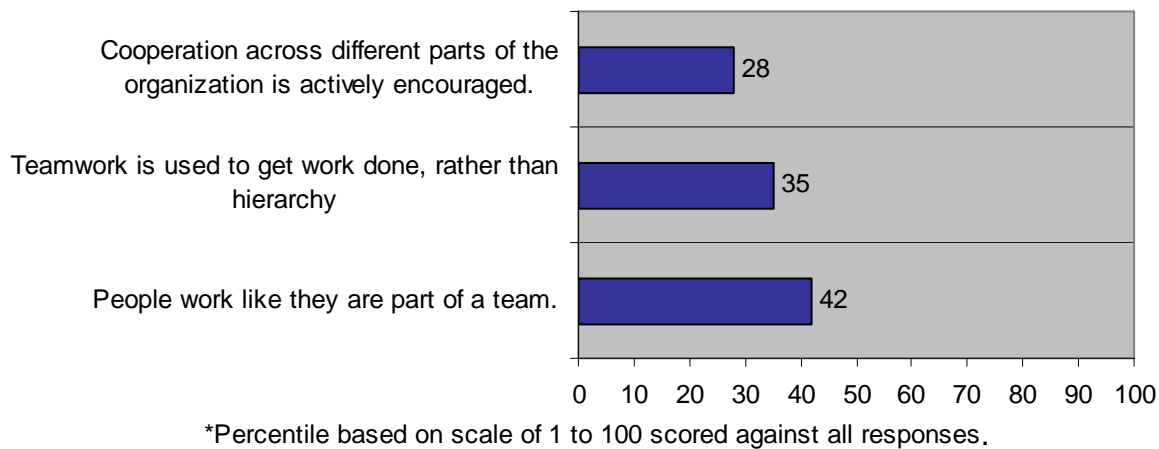


Figure 2. Summary of secondary data results.

Empowerment data. There were three questions related to empowerment that scored low on the 2004 StorageTek employee survey. The question with the lowest score was, “In this organization authority is delegated so that people can act on their own.” The next lowest scoring question was, “In this organization decisions are usually made at the level where the best information is available.” The question with the third lowest score was, “In this organization most employees are highly involved in their work.” The employee dissatisfaction with these questions was a surprise to management.

Cross-functional partnering data. There were three questions related to cross-functional partnering that scored low in the 2004 StorageTek employee survey. The question with the lowest score was, “In this organization cooperation across different parts of the organization is actively encouraged. The next lowest scoring question was, “In this organization teamwork is used to get the work done, rather than hierarchy. The question with the third lowest score was, “In this organization people work like they are part of a team.” The composite scores for cross-functional partnering were much lower than the scores in the empowerment category.

Individual Interviews

The feedback from the five individual interviews provided responses that had both similar and unique elements. Some of the common comments had to do with providing better training opportunities, analysis of job title, reward and recognition, and job responsibilities. The feedback from the empowerment section generally was more in-depth compared to the feedback from the cross-functional partnering questions. The following section contains summary results of each of the individual interviews.

Training quality. The employees that provided individual interviews in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing identified four issues related to training that were points of dissatisfaction for them. The prevailing comment was that training did not cover all of the aspects of their job which resulted in them not being prepared for the day-to-day requirements. The feedback was consistent from representatives of each work group. Of concern was that the training related to their specific job duties was not specific or long enough. The interviewees also commented on the fact that the trainer did not adapt to the training style that best suited the employee being trained. As a result the training was not as productive as it should have been.

Training availability. The second issue related to how training is emphasized by management, which created confusion and frustration by several in the group. Despite management’s push for employees to participate in training, the prevailing theme was that it is difficult to find training that meets individual development needs. The StorageTek training

facility provides comprehensive training to employees for product-related needs, but the course selection for non-product topics is poor. In the case of the three departments, none of the employees require product-related training, and the majority has completed the behavioral courses that are available.

Offsite training availability. A third common concern is that offsite options for training should be available. StorageTek requires all employees to have individual development plans that target training with the goal of improving performance. However, employees have little access to outside training resources. With this in mind, the employees in the department feel that they must enroll in the same mundane classes year after year so that management does not penalize them on their annual performance assessment. The point that several emphasized was whereas training seemed to be a situation where the classes do little to improve their performance, it does keep them in good standing with management.

Consequences of offsite training. The fourth issue was that employees who are able to find offsite training feel apprehensive about taking classes because of the burden placed on the department. Because department staffing is minimal, training classes that are more than three days in length present workflow challenges for the departments. Feedback indicated that management may be a proponent of the employee taking a class, but the department peers are very vocal about the imposition placed on them when others aren't present. Some of the employee reactions to outside training have quelled any enthusiasm that others had for participating in outside training.

Job title dissatisfaction. Employees also identified two issues relating to their individual job titles that were a significant source of frustration. Every employee indicated that they were dissatisfied with the job titles in the department. The job titles in Corporate Printing and Literature Distribution were meaningless to the interviewees. Some of the employees had been in the department over 15 years and their job title had never changed while the job responsibilities were significantly different. A common theme of these individuals was that they made up titles or responsibilities when describing job functions to peers and external business associates.

In Software Manufacturing there was also dissatisfaction over job titles, but the reason was slightly different from Corporate Printing and Literature Distribution. Software Manufacturing had their job titles changed to reflect a contemporary job title in 2003, and the result of that reshuffling still makes employees unhappy. The result for some staff members was a job title and salary grade change that netted them a lower salary grade. Although this change did not impact employee pay, the change was unpopular because the affected staff members felt that they now had limited future earnings potential. There also was feedback indicating that these out-of-date job titles have job descriptions that are meaningless and, as a result, it is impossible to plan a career progression path in the department.

Rewards and recognition unhappiness. The employees interviewed in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing identified reward and recognition as a point of dissatisfaction. Several employees in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing commented that the rewards and recognition were not satisfactory. They identified three issues with rewards and recognition that caused them discontent.

First, in 2004 StorageTek replaced a flexible reward and recognition program with a restrictive alternative. The employees felt that the new reward and recognition program was inadequate compared to the previous program. The ability to give rewards was cumbersome, requiring multiple layers of management approval, which created management scrutiny in the minds of the employees and acted as a disincentive for giving recognition. The key point was that the flexibility of the program was gone.

The second theme that the employees articulated was that management did little to endorse other forms of reward and recognition beyond the new process. The feedback indicated that the employees did not feel that management placed a high level of importance on rewards and recognition. Their perspective was that this was integral to individual employee satisfaction within the department.

The last comment that came up was that many peers within the department seemed to make no effort to share recognition with other employees when it was appropriate. Several

commented that they felt only the point person would get the accolades for successful department projects. Some of the employees thought that this lack of sharing was intentional and that the lack of recognition for all creates a divisive atmosphere on big projects.

Job responsibilities. Several employees commented their job responsibilities were too narrowly defined, and they should have broader day-to-day job responsibilities that provided a greater opportunity to contribute. The comments also pointed to the fact that the workflow processes are rewarding for those in key positions, but for the employees in supporting roles, very dissatisfying. The desired change this workgroup dynamic so that the employees receive more satisfaction from their current jobs and that they in turn could contribute to the better performance of the department. The employees felt that the job hierarchy creates peer-to-peer conflicts and results in the unhappiness in the departments.

Group Interviews

The feedback from the three group interviews provided responses detailing areas of dissatisfaction having to do with creating better employee interaction within groups, empowering individuals through communication, the lack of training opportunities, the disconnect of job titles to job functions, and employee reward and recognition. The feedback from the empowerment section generally was more in-depth compared to the feedback from the cross-functional partnering questions. The following section contains summary results of each of the individual interviews.

Peer-to-peer interaction. In the group discussion there was a significant amount of time spent talking about how employee interaction within the departments is not always effective. Poor communication at an employee-to-employee level was identified as a key reason why empowerment was not as good as possible. The interviewees generally identified employees' unwillingness to share information about projects as a significant reason why projects often were unsuccessful or not as successful as possible. In the course of the interview several participants made the point that they felt management needed to stress to all employees that they are a team

and that two-way communication is a requirement. Overall, the problems with peer-to-peer interaction seemed significant in the group interviews.

Empowering employees through communication. The participants felt that management withholds critical information on projects as a way to control the employee behavior. This controlling, non-communicative approach provided few opportunities for employees to be empowered in their day-to-day work position. Much of the feedback centered on the idea that the only way management could empower across the organization was to provide more timely information to the department, the pending projects, and the latitude of responsibility for each employee. As the departments were currently operated, some employees felt that they had limited decision making ability because of the management approach to running the day-to-day business.

The participants in the group interviews also raised concerns about department members not sharing information. Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution and Software Manufacturing were linked together in job responsibility, yet some employees do not communicate critical information that would empower others. The group interviewees felt that this tendency to hold back information needed to be immediately addressed by management. This controlling behavior often times mirrored how management communicated to the departments, and that employees took a similar approach when communicating to peers because that is what they believed to be acceptable.

Training quality. Some of the employees in the group interviews felt that they did not have enough opportunity to cross-train in the organization. There was a desire to learn additional roles and responsibilities, and management was not open to this. These employees felt that management was closed to cross-training because many of the jobs that employees wanted cross-training in were senior positions held by senior employees who might view cross-training as a threat. Another point that came up was that senior employees had more training options available to them because of their skill set, and this was creating a talent gap in the departments.

Training availability. Another issue was how difficult it was to find training that met the requirements of individual's developmental needs. Management encouraged employees to pursue meaningful opportunities but there were not a lot of options, and some of the employees indicated that training requirements did little to motivate due to the limited options available. For Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing the group interviewees felt that they needed industry-specific training that related to printing, leadership, or project management. These were not courses that are available at the company.

Offsite training availability. A common concern had to do with the fundamental process of finding, enrolling, and paying for outside training. Many in the group were either confused as to what the company policy was for outside training, and some did not even know it was available, while others had misconceptions as to the process for approvals. The employees discussed the perceived disconnect that they shared and how they felt it had limited their skill set development.

Rewards and recognition unhappiness. The employees interviewed in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing identified reward and recognition as a point of dissatisfaction. Several employees in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing commented that the rewards and recognition were not satisfactory. They identified three issues with rewards and recognition that were dissatisfying.

First, in 2004 StorageTek replaced a flexible reward and recognition program with a restrictive alternative. The employees felt that the new reward and recognition program was inadequate compared to the previous program. The ability to give rewards was cumbersome, requiring multiple layers of management approval that created management scrutiny in the minds of the employees and acted as a disincentive for giving recognition. The key point was that the flexibility of the program was gone.

The second theme the employees articulated was that management did little to endorse other forms of reward and recognition beyond the new process. The employees did not feel that management placed a high level of importance on rewards and recognition. However, the

employees considered rewards and recognition as integral to individual employee satisfaction within the department.

The last comment that did come up was that many peers within the department seemed to make no effort to share recognition with other employees when it was appropriate. Several commented that they feel only the point person would get the accolades for successful department projects. Some of the employees seemed to think that this lack of sharing was intentional, and that the lack of recognition for all creates a divisive atmosphere on big projects.

Job responsibilities. Several employees commented that they felt their job responsibilities were too narrowly defined, and they should have broader day-to-day job responsibilities that provided a greater opportunity to contribute. The comments suggested that the workflow processes that must be followed are rewarding for the few who are in key positions, but for the employees in supporting roles, very dissatisfying. The desire was to change this workgroup dynamic so that the employees received more satisfaction from their current jobs, and that they in turn could contribute to the department's improved performance. The employees clearly felt that a job hierarchy was in play that created peer-to-peer conflicts and resulted in unhappiness in the departments.

Focus Group Interviews

Two focus group interviews were held with Corporate Printing and Literature Distribution participating together in one focus group interview and Software Manufacturing participating in the other focus group meeting. Both focus groups were asked to provide feedback on six identified areas of dissatisfaction: (a) training, (b) individual performance goals, (c) reward and recognition, (d) job titles, (e) communication, and (f) empowerment. Additionally, both focus groups were provided an opportunity to add items of concern that the individual groups could discuss. After these items were reviewed, the group was asked to provide its opinions on potential solutions related to each problem category. For each of the six problems, there were multiple solutions that were identified by the collaborative team.

Software Manufacturing focus group feedback. The employees provided specific information related to the potential solutions that were presented. For the training problems, the employees felt three of the solutions would be best for the team. First, linking teamwork and cross-functional partnering together seemed to be important to the group. The overall opinion was that the employees needed to improve their interaction to improve partnering. If the overall staff training improved, the employees would be in a better position to communicate and partner with their peers. The second training solution that the staff was enthused about was determining where cross-training is practical and where it is not. Many staff members felt that the expectations of who can and who can't cross-train, as well as understanding where there is value in cross-training, were important. The third potential solution that the group identified was clarifying the corporate policy and organization philosophy for outside training. There was a high degree of unhappiness with the internal training available, and the policy and process to enroll in outside education programs was vague for many. They wanted to take advantage of outside training resources but were unsure if this was possible.

The group also held the opinion that goals needed redefining. They believed that the individual performance goals were not always applicable to their job, and so a priority was to change this. The staff wanted more input as to the goals and the measures that tied to their individual performance.

Reward and recognition was also a concern, and the potential solutions generated specific feedback. The first potential solution that the focus group considered was making rewards and recognition more group oriented. The Software Manufacturing group works in an end-to-end supply chain manner so no one person is typically responsible for the success of a project. They also wanted to have management use forms of recognition different from the StorageTek corporate program. They wanted a personal program where recognition was tied to praise rather than a cash award, acknowledgement in a staff setting, and exposure at higher management level. Lastly, they wanted agreement from all staff members that when one employee would receive

some form of recognition, they would check with management to see if all involved employees received recognition.

The group was optimistic that two potential solutions to empowerment would improve the individual employee satisfaction. First, they liked the idea of reviewing work processes individually with the department manager, and that questions about the latitude of decision making could be discussed should they arise. If this process was reviewed by the manager with every employee, they felt that many of the empowerment answers could be clarified and this would have established clear boundaries of responsibility. Any confusion over job responsibilities could be discussed in a professional setting where the employee was comfortable communicating with the manager.

Corporate Printing and Literature Distribution focus group feedback. The employees provided specific information related to the potential solutions that were presented. For the training problems, the employees felt four of the solutions would be best for the team.

First, linking teamwork and cross-functional partnering together was important to the group. The overall opinion was that the employees needed to improve their interaction in order to improve partnering. If the overall staff training improved, the employees would be in a better position to communicate and partner with their peers.

The second training solution that the staff was enthused about was having a training skills assessment specific to their job. The staff felt that if this was completed, they would be able to focus their training where it was most important. This action would provide them with the information they needed to improve their skill development.

The third potential solution that received favorable feedback in the focus group setting was that many staff members feel it is important to formalize the cross-training activity. The staff would like to know who trains, how the training will be organized, and the frequency. Many of the staff commented that they became frustrated by the ambiguity in the training process and the proposed action would help change that.

The fourth potential solution was defining who would cross-train and when this would happen. Clearly not everyone could cross-train at the same time, but the training activities would be better planned if there were a master schedule. The staff would also know when they would get an opportunity to cross-train which would have a positive impact on their attitude.

The staff also held a strong opinion that goals needed redefining. They believed that many of their current individual performance goals were not applicable to their job and that changing this was a priority. The staff wanted more input in the development of their goals and with the measures that were tied to their individual performance. In addition, the staff believed that the goals should be changed to be positive and less punitive in form. By making the wording of the goals more positive, employees felt that they could report on a missed goal now and not feel that they would be punished for a missed goal objective. Many thought this wording change would encourage risk taking.

Reward and recognition was also a concern, and the potential solutions generated specific feedback. The first potential solution that the focus group considered was making rewards and recognition more group oriented. Many felt that the recognition was viewed from an individual perspective when the majority of the work utilized multiple staff members. In Corporate Printing and Literature Distribution the staff would like recognition to be in the form of acknowledgement of achievement in staff meetings rather than a cash reward. The staff felt it was more important for their peers to know about the good accomplishments. Additionally, where exposure at a higher management level was important, they would like management to actively promote the accomplishments. The last potential solution to rewards and recognition that the staff was enthused about was having agreement from all staff members that when one employee would receive some form of recognition, he or she would check with management to see if all involved employees received recognition. This form of shared recognition was very important because teamwork is stressed heavily in the department.

The group also was optimistic that one potential solution to empowerment would improve the individual employee satisfaction. The staff liked the idea of reviewing work

processes individually with the department manager and discussing issues concerning the latitude of decision making. This was viewed as an opportunity to better align the group in decision making. If the manager did this with every employee, the employees felt many of the empowerment questions could be clarified.

Discussion

Initial Analysis

Two of the three questions related to empowerment were lower than the StorageTek company composite, and the third was just fractionally higher. An initial analysis suggested a few possible scenarios that would cause these ratings. The first possibility is that a command-and-control style of management exists. It is possible that the level of delegation of decision making responsibilities in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing does not match the current expectations of the employees. StorageTek is in the computer peripherals segment and currently manufactures the majority of the machines it sells. Engineering companies tend to be process driven where adherence to a repeatable process is considered vital. There is the possibility that this management style is present, and that it is too restrictive or authoritative for these departments.

Northouse (2004) made a distinction between management and leadership by defining leadership as transcending all levels of an organization and management as having decisions being made at a focal point in an organization. For an organization to be effective, it needs to have leadership both at the top and throughout the group. If the management in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing embodies a leadership mentality, the delegation of roles and responsibilities would improve the overall satisfaction in the departments.

The second possibility is that there may be an unhealthy employee attitude about sharing the praise and accolades of work accomplishments. Some of the participants indicated that peers were unwilling to include other staff members in the project recognition, but prefer to represent themselves as having completed all of the work. The origin of this behavior may have its roots in

the survival mentality in the company. StorageTek has had several layoffs in its history, and there is the possibility that the tenured employees feel the need to have their work stand out in relation to their peers. It is evident that employee competition exists at StorageTek and is present in these departments as well. The employees in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing may believe that they are in competition with their peers. If they feel this way, then empowerment and teamwork likely would be diminished. The employees in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing would not be motivated to delegate their work responsibility in this atmosphere. In the end this may put pressure on the day-to-day job flow and then force the management team to become even more commanding and controlling in style. Park and Burrows (2003) indicated that Dell changed its culture by having a shared management structure that allowed more employees to make decisions. Analysis of the current level of decision making and if it meets the needs of the group may show that modifications to the organization's structure are required.

All three of the questions related to cross-functional partnering are lower than the StorageTek company composite. An initial analysis would indicate that there are reasons for the results. The first scenario is that Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing lack a shared vision. At times there may be a shared vision with productive working relationships, but at other times it seems that an employees' perspective is based more on individual objectives. This could explain why the employees rated the questions about cooperation and teamwork low. Senge (1994) argued that creating a shared vision is vital to the success of an organization. With this in mind, Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing may need some team development that is directed at creating an environment where the focus is centered more on the whole and less on the individual parts. By doing this, the management team may be able to improve the employee satisfaction and also improve department performance.

The second possible scenario is that the three cross-functional partnering questions were rated low, indicating that the employees in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and

Software Manufacturing are firmly entrenched in the specific job tasks that they are required to perform everyday. For them to venture out of their realm of expertise and contribute in other capacities, a mind shift likely needs to happen. It would seem that across Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing the perception is about completing ones individual work. It is possible that this is contributing to the low satisfaction, and that the overall management style may need to change. It would be useful to look at the employees who are in leadership positions in the department and determine what their priorities are. Do those leaders stress individual task accomplishment as a priority or do they emphasize the need to develop both individual and team capabilities? It is possible that a change in thinking will improve employee performance and satisfaction levels.

Collaborative Activities

The collaborative team played primary a role in this action research project, providing ideas and opinions that help shape the scope of the project. The first activity was forming the team, which was comprised of five members. Four were members of Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution and Software Manufacturing with the fifth being a member of a sister organization. The team met eight times for approximately 1 – 2 hours per meeting. The initial kickoff meeting was informative and was used to establish objectives and serve as a question-and-answer session for the members. The team members were engaged and excited about the opportunity to participate in the project.

One event that did impact the collaborative team occurred after the second meeting; one of the members transitioned out of the department and thus ended his participation on the project. This changed the interaction dynamic significantly which in my opinion, was a benefit to the team. This individual at times was not receptive to new ideas. I think over time he may have become a detriment to the team given that my goal was to have discussion as free flowing as possible; this may not have happened had he stayed involved.

In the eight meetings that the team had, attendance was perfect except for one instance where an employee missed a meeting due to work obligations. The employee was informed of the results of the meeting.

The team functioned well. Everyone consistently contributed opinions, ideas, and came prepared to discuss specific comments that they had read in the documents that I provided them.

A key area of collaboration for the collective team was in the preparation of the focus group meetings. The team successfully brainstormed potential interventions after considering the feedback from the employees in the departments. By providing insight and opinions on solutions based on their peer feedback, the collaborative team assumed ownership in the solution. This was very effective with the project encompassing more than just management's idea of desired interventions to the problems.

Overall, the feedback I received indicated that the collaborative team thought the process was meaningful and they appreciated their ability to contribute their ideas in the process. In addition, working with them allowed me to build better relationships with these individuals.

Feedback to Organization

There were different levels of feedback to the organizations. The project sponsor was informed at a minimum bi-weekly of the project. Over the course of 6 months, I reviewed the specifics of the project each step of the way. She listened to initial findings and provided feedback about the information I provided. I feel the project sponsor was great at listening and not intruding in the project. She provided input, support, and acted as a motivator to keep the project on track and relevant.

From an organizational perspective, the staff members in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution and Software Manufacturing were regularly updated with the latest status about the project in department staff meetings. I provided them with information as to what the project was, why the project was going to happen, and what their requirement for participation would be. Additionally, over the 6 months of data collection they were informed in staff meetings about the activities and status of the project. I feel this frequency of communication was effective because

it did not make the project seem like some type of secretive activity. Due to the need to keep specific feedback anonymous, the early information was talked about at a high level where the departments had a general understanding of what was happening. However, in the focus group section, all staff members were provided summary findings and detailed actions in advance of the meetings. This allowed them to review the information and come to the meeting with feedback that was developed over a few days. I believe this was a benefit to the employees in the departments. Overall, the non-collaborative team members had a minimum of two structured activities to participate in the action research project and several other non-structured opportunities.

Action Plan Alternatives

The first alternative action plan would be to engage Human Resources in a complete review of the job titles in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution and Software Manufacturing. All three departments expressed their dissatisfaction about the current titles and how this impacted their satisfaction. They were looking for job titles that they believed to be relevant to their jobs, the company, and industry standards. If the job titles were relevant to their daily tasks, the employees would have higher self-esteem, which in turn would entice the staff to collaborate more effectively. Across the board, the staff in the departments indicated that they were embarrassed by their job titles when describing their job functions to other employees and vendors. By making this a priority and changing these titles, the employees would have increased confidence in their roles, which would contribute to a higher level of productivity and satisfaction.

The second alternative would be to address the employee reward and recognition program by making changes to it at a department level and articulating the latitude in which the employees could participate. The current reward and recognition program was a big dissatisfier for all of the departments. Generally speaking, the employees felt that whereas performance in the past was rewarded in a positive manner; it was no longer rewarded in that same positive manner. The staff was looking for management to create a program that would support

department actions, and more effectively allow the employees to feel valued and recognized by their peers. These actions would ensure that recognition was shared by all who contribute, provide alternative forms of recognition not currently available, and communicate regularly to the department the actions that merit recognition. The proposed changes would increase satisfaction, thereby compelling them to engage in more cross-functional activities.

The third alternative is to change the employee goal reporting requirements to better align with the employee job responsibilities. Several of the employees indicated that they thought their goals did not align to their jobs, and that several of the goals that they had were punitive. In their minds this resulted in employee behaviors that contribute to less-than-expected partnering and empowerment. If the punitive goals are reworded into a form that is positive, then staff members would take chances more often and empowerment themselves in certain settings. Additionally, cross-functional partnering satisfaction would increase if the goals that were relevant to everyone were shared. By having shared goals, the commitment level would increase and the partnering would improve.

Critical Evaluation of Alternatives

The key problem with changing only the job titles in the department is that it is not a sufficiently detailed solution. More needs to be accomplished for the staff members to feel that cross-functional partnering and empowerment have improved. The unhappiness over job titles does have merit, and if it is used in conjunction with other activities, it will contribute to transformation the department into a better work environment. Marshall (1995) stated that the way to build ownership of a team's operation and to ensure the alignment of its members is to leverage a strategic company direction. This strategic direction should include a collaborative team structure. Marshall outlined eight steps to build an effective collaborative team. These eight steps start with clarifying the team's task or function, clarifying team roles and responsibilities, establishing operating agreements, creating a team charter, identifying critical success factors, developing an action plan, beginning collaborative skills development, and establishing measures and measuring progress. By changing job titles to be more pertinent to the job, I would be fully

addressing only step 2, clarifying team roles and responsibilities, because a job title review would entail a job function review. As a stand-alone action, there is just not enough substance to make a positive change in the departments with only a job title change.

The key problem with changing only the reward and recognition program is that it also fails to cover all of the items that have resulted in employee dissatisfaction with empowerment and cross-functional partnering. A better reward and recognition program would likely create incentives to cross-functionally partner and act on empowerment opportunities. Todd (2002) stated that the notion of employee satisfaction may be overrated and could possibly have little relevance to the success of an organization. He is of the opinion that advancement opportunity and how challenging that job is are more important. Therefore, it is likely that a better reward and recognition program will not be meaningful for all of the staff. Taking that thought a step further, I believe that the reward and recognition changes must be linked to a more detailed and encompassing plan to improve the employee satisfaction with empowerment and cross-functional partnering. A broader reaching plan that is focused on changing several issues would contribute to the organization's success.

The key problem with redefining employee's goals is that it also fails to broadly address the elements of dissatisfaction that the employees in the departments have. Having goals that are reflective of the job one does and are reported on in a positive manner should broaden the employee's responsibilities and improve satisfaction. Improving overall employee satisfaction will require more than just addressing this single issue because even though it is a problem, there are more issues to be considered. From my perspective if the employees want changes in their individual and team goals, they will need to take an active role working together and with management in developing the right goals. This will require leaders within the departments to step up and help facilitate the desired change.

Northouse (2004) examined the differences between leadership and management. Northouse saw a definite distinction between management and leadership. The problem of empowerment and cross-functional partnering may be linked to the Northouses position that

leadership influences a group of individuals to achieve a communal goal while management mandates rather than influences. For Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing the issues are more complex than rewriting goals; it is getting the leaders within the departments to step forward and assume an active role in the business decisions of the department.

Action Plan Selected

The plan of action that is the best intervention for Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution and Software Manufacturing is a series of changes to the training process, goal defining process, rewards and recognition, job titles and job process clarification. Some of these actions are rejected as singular activities, but collectively they should have an immediate impact on overall employee satisfaction. My conclusion is the complex issues that have resulted in the lower-than-desired satisfaction levels require a solution that includes elements from each solution category.

The fact that training was identified as a problem throughout the departments leads me to conclude that this is the first topic that needs change. My plan is to have a training assessment related to each specific job in the department. This will provide each employee with a specific and clear outline of the level of their skill set. In the training solution, I will make a determination of how training is provided in the departments. Basically, this activity will be formalized with an agreement from staff members as to their required level of responsibility. After this is complete, employees will be identified for cross-training assignments, and they will be provided with a formal schedule to make this process efficient and meaningful. Tied to who is trained, the staff members that are not initially involved in a cross-training activity will receive a commitment for training opportunities at a later date. In the case of jobs for which cross-training is not practical, management will communicate the reasons for denying training. The final action to take in a training solution is to inform the staff of external resources that they can leverage in their career development.

Redefining goals will be a part of the overall intervention. I will meet with each employee to review his or her goals, and collectively we will determine which goals apply to the job that he or she performs. The focus will be on making goals positive instead of punitive, and being sure that individual goals and group goals are categorized correctly. Group goals and individual goals will be reported separately.

Making changes to the rewards and recognition will also improve employee satisfaction with empowerment and cross-functional partnering. If an effort is made to ensure recognition is shared and that employees receive alternative forms of recognition other than cash awards, then the employees will be encouraged to participate in the day-to-day decision making. The employees indicated that they were looking for an equitable system that made them feel appreciated. By recognizing the good work more often and ensuring that the recognition is shared, employees will feel valued, which in turn will increase their sense of self-worth to the departments in which they work.

It was unanimous throughout the departments that employee dissatisfaction with job titles was a big problem and provided little motivation to extend oneself. By working with Human Resources to review job titles and provide contemporary titles, the employees will feel that they have jobs that are industry current. The current opinion is that the job titles are meaningless, and because they are meaningless the work they do is not really valued. By making a change, the department employees will have better pride in what they do. I believe this single act will have a way of improving their self-worth and increase the overall department morale. If the morale improves, the willingness of the staff members to work together in a more effective manner will also increase.

The last intervention that is critical to improving empowerment and cross-functional partnering is to review and update with each employee the detailed job instructions and process for their job. Because some of the detailed job instructions and processes are currently inaccurate, many employees will not make a process decision that is out of the ordinary for fear of making the wrong choice. This step of reviewing, discussing, and the updating job instructions

and processes with each employee will provide the employees with the direction they require to make decisions with confidence. It is important that employees feel that they have the ability to make decisions out of the norm in their daily job. Collaboratively we can work to resolve areas where they have doubts about their ability to make an empowered decision. By doing this, the employee and I can come to an agreement as to the decision making authority that they have in their job. This should go a long way to increasing overall employee satisfaction with empowerment.

Expected Problems and Resistance

There are two likely problems that a few employees in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution and Software Manufacturing are not going to embrace once the interventions are implemented. The first issue relates to training. Some of the employees are not willing to cross-train other employees in their current jobs. The reason for this attitude is tied to their belief that since they do not desire job change, cross-training is not necessary. These few employees have held the same positions for a number of years and they therefore feel it is unproductive to train others to do their jobs. This problem will need to be solved on an individual basis with management because it is imperative that this mindset changes for the betterment of the department.

The second issue where there will be problems relates to rewards and recognition. At times only the department lead for a project receives recognition, when a larger set of department employees also merits that recognition. Some staff members in the past have been unwilling to share praise with their peers when it was warranted. This is likely to continue to be a problem if it is not addressed with the employees that keep the rewards and recognition to themselves. Sharing recognition is a big component in this project and getting the few employees that have refused to share rewards and recognition in the past will be a challenge but also a necessity.

Organization Learning

The action research project produced two immediate benefits that were learning opportunities for the staff in Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software

Manufacturing. First, the collaborative team was comprised of department members whose involvement in the project resulted in learning. Prior to this project, those staff members not been in a position to make assessments, contribute ideas, or influence an organization at a high level. The collaborative team appeared to find their involvement to be educational. By the end of the project members understood the positive changes by which they could exert influence within their department. The result was a willingness by staff members to assume an active leadership role in the organization. The added leadership that these employees exhibited has been noticeable, and it can be attributed to the learning experience.

For the staff members who were not on the collaborative team, I also have noticed some changes that I attribute to the learning experience. The group interviews and focus group meetings allowed some staff members to articulate thoughts in a comfortable environment. I believe that this comfortable setting allowed some employees to grow in confidence, while for others it was a chance to listen and respond. In these settings the dialogue really covered the issues in depth. It became apparent that like the collaborative team, the majority of the employees increased their learning because the dialogue challenged them to consider new ideas.

Objective Analysis of Experience

The relationship building that I experienced with the collaborative team members was probably the biggest surprise and the source of greatest satisfaction for me. I did not anticipate just how meaningful that process would be. The group members that I selected were not necessarily my top-rated performers, but rather employees that I thought would contribute ideas and make the commitment to the project. By the end of the project, I believe the typical management-employee communication barriers with these employees had been removed and now open dialogue was a strong point in our working relationship.

Another item that became obvious through this process was that for the employee's their sense of self-worth was tied to the work that they performed. It was very important to the staff that they were in a position to successfully perform their assigned job functions in order to contribute to the success of the organization and the company. I realized early in this process that

it was not about how the manager dictates workflows or assignments, but how leaders at all levels of an organization represent themselves and the work they perform. In Corporate Printing, Literature Distribution, and Software Manufacturing it was very important for the staff members to have positive feelings about their roles and responsibilities. When employees felt valued, respected, and relied upon by their management and their peers, job satisfaction increased dramatically. The level of pride in the organization was much deeper than I realized. Not only did the manager take pride in the operation, this pride extended to all employees throughout the organization. Understanding this changed my perspective on how I should approach future department issues that will arise. I believe the proper approach is to engage key stakeholders in issues and collaborate together to achieve a resolution. The degree of collaboration when solving an issue will impact on how long that solution will be effective.

One key thing that I would try to do differently is expedite the process. I feel that 6 months was too long for this process. I was working with a three-department group of 17 employees, and at times the delays in compiling the data created a few gaps in the process. Had I had the ability to spend more time on the project, I would have been able to condense the project into a 4-month time frame. The pressure I felt in managing the project was constantly in the back of my mind. My collaborative team was so engaged in the process and after each meeting there was such a rush of energy and enthusiasm that I felt I needed to move to the next step quickly. However at times, I just was not able to do the work necessary in a tighter timeline to keep the project moving smoothly. Related to the staff not involved in the collaborative team, I noticed that some members needed reengaging every time there was a collaborative activity. If the process had been shorter, the staff would have been more excited about the project because they did not see first-hand the work that was happening at the collaborative team level. They participated in the process, but there were gaps in time that limited their perspective to the overall project.

Steps to Do Differently

A big challenge to this action research project was establishing project timelines and meeting those dates. Although the project went relatively smoothly and the timelines that I established were generally met, I could have shortened the data gathering portion by a few weeks. The individual and group interviews were on schedule, but the time I spent summarizing and compiling the comments took longer than expected. The information that I captured in the individual and group interviews was more detailed than I expected. This level of detail led to the problem of the transfer time when converting the information in written form from the interviews and converting that feedback into electronic form for the collaborative team to review. The added transfer time resulted in a few slow periods, and when the collaborative team reassembled, a significant portion of those meetings were spent reviewing what was discussed previously. Clearly hitting the milestones in an action research project is very important, and for the most part they were achieved; however the time between collaborative team meetings was too great. The experience for this project has provided me with a better understanding of how best to pace a project of this scope and magnitude.

Recommendations for Further Study

I believe that an in-depth study of job titles would provide insight if the employees had contemporary job titles and were paid commensurate with their responsibilities. By studying the job titles in the organization and reviewing the compensation that is tied to those job titles, an appropriate salary range could be established. Currently the job titles within the organization are meaningless, and it is reasonable to assume that the salary ranges may also be inappropriate. This would require working closely with Human Resources to complete a study to determine appropriate job titles for the employees working in the departments. These types of projects at StorageTek typically take months to complete, and in order to have an immediate impact on employee satisfaction completing a study as soon as possible is important. If a further study happened, it might not only produce a few selected job title changes but also salary adjustments for those staff members as well.

Conclusion

Overall this action research project was successful on many different levels. First there was a clear opportunity to make a difference with employee perspectives related to empowerment and cross-functional partnering. I am confident that the issues were identified and that a road map can be put in place to make improvements in these areas.

Second, this process got employees and management communicating on a level that was not present in the past. Because of this, I feel employee-manager relations have improved and that many employees are willing to now talk about ideas and concerns where in the past this most likely would not have happened.

Third, and most importantly, this action research project has given me the experience and confidence to lead other groups through organizational issues in the future.

References

- About StorageTek*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 9, 2005, from http://www.storagetek.com/about/fact_sheet.html
- Denison Consulting. (2004, November). *2004 StorageTek employee survey*. Ann Arbor, MA: "Author"
- Huszczo, G. E. (1996). *Tools for team excellence*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Supervisory Management. (1995). *Training Cross-Functional Teams*, 40(3), 10.
- Senge, P. M. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook: strategies and tools for building a learning organization* (rev. ed.). New York: Currency Doubleday.
- Whitworth, B., & Riccomini, B. (2005). Unlocking Higher Employee Performance. *Communication World*, 22(2), 18.
- Northouse, P. (2004). *Leadership theory and practice* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Park, A., & Burrows, P. (2003). What You Don't Know About Dell. *Business Week*, 3856
- Marshall, E. (1995). Creating Collaborative Teams. *HR Focus*, 72(4) 5.
- Todd, R. (2002). Happiness May Be Overrated. *Workforce*, 81(5) 80.
- Paul, R., Niehoff, B., & Turnley, W. (2000). Empowerment, Expectations, and The Psychological Contract-Managing the Dilemmas and Gaining the Advantages. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 29(5) 471.
- Harvard Business Essentials (2003). *Managing change and transition* (1st ed.). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.
- Cummings, T. G., & Worley, C. G. (2001). *Organization development and change* (7th ed.). Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Publishing.
- Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2001). *Doing action research in your own organization* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Fink, A., & Kosecoff, J., (1998). *How to conduct surveys a step by step guide* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Appendix

Individual and Group Interview Questions

1. What does empowerment mean to you?
2. In this organization, what would need to happen to improve your perception empowerment?
3. Explain how this would change or improve your satisfaction with empowerment? Why?
4. What does cross-functional partnering mean to you?
5. In this organization, what would need to happen to improve your perception of cross-functional partnering?
6. Explain how this would change or improve your satisfaction with cross-functional partnering? Why?